

VA**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

News Release

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Washington, D.C. -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will mark the international observance of World AIDS Day on Dec. 1 with a renewed commitment to caring for HIV-infected persons and a quest for advances through research.

VA is recognized as a leader in the study and state-of-the-art treatment of AIDS. It has been the nation's largest single source of AIDS care since the beginning of the epidemic in the U.S., having cared for more than 27,000 AIDS patients. Today, 150 VA facilities treat about 16,000 patients with HIV or AIDS each year.

In addition, VA has four specialized centers for research on AIDS -- Atlanta; Durham, N.C.; New York; and San Diego -- and VA scientists across the country last year received nearly \$27 million from VA and other sources to support more than 260 studies on diagnosis, treatment and prevention of the disease. In 1987 and 1988, VA established specialized AIDS clinical treatment units at its New York, Miami, San Francisco, and West Los Angeles medical centers.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS has devoted the 1997 campaign for World AIDS Day to raising awareness about the plight of children affected by the disease. It estimates that by the end of this year, about one million children under the age of 15 will be living with the virus, and within a decade AIDS will be a major cause of death among children.

Because most children acquire the virus from HIV-positive mothers, an adult-oriented health-care system such as VA's has an important role to play in improving the knowledge and sense of responsibility of both men and women about HIV prevention, and by increasing women's access to antiviral drug regimens that can cut the risk of mother-to-child transmission.

World AIDS Day 1997 comes as the VA health-care system is expanding its emphasis on primary and outpatient care. Outpatient services are a growing part of AIDS care and present greater opportunities to treat and counsel HIV-positive veterans and those at risk of developing HIV.

Some VA facilities will mark World AIDS Day with special displays, distribution of literature, or other educational programs.

Recent research by VA investigators includes the development of new tests for antiviral drug evaluation and identifying a connection between an AIDS-associated virus and the bone marrow cancer multiple myeloma.

VA researchers also have published their discovery that dormant HIV hides in immune system cells even after drug therapy has suppressed the virus to virtually undetectable levels in a patient's bloodstream. Another project showed that monocytes, a type of immune system cell infected by the AIDS virus, cause the brain's nerve cells to destroy themselves, which could lead to new blood tests to detect the onset of AIDS dementia and help scientists test treatments to prevent it.